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One Tree At A Time

Uintah Mountains, Utah -- On the north slope of the Uintah Mountains, approximately 10,000 pine trees are getting special attention, one tree at a time. The trees are being individually sprayed with a chemical mixture to ward off pine beetles.

“The spray is designed to protect the tree against attack by the mountain pine beetle. It is a preventative treatment, so it must be applied before the tree is attacked,” said Colleen Keyes, Forest Health Coordinator for the State Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands. “Spray treatments are a short-term measure to protect high value trees. Active forest management that alters forest conditions so that they are less favorable to bark beetles is the best long-term solution.”

Bark beetles, like the mountain pine beetle, kill more large trees every year than fire. Several species of bark beetles are or have been at outbreak levels over the last decade. For example, in Utah, bark beetles have killed an estimated 8 million trees between 1997 and 2005.

“We work with the Forest Service and other agencies to do a variety of forest health treatments,” said Keyes. “For instance, in the area around Sundance, a cooperative effort between the Forest Service, the Utah Division of Forestry, Fire and State Lands and private landowners is underway to reduce Douglas fir beetle-induced mortality and beetle population levels. Forest health treatments in this area include, thinning over-dense stands, and the use of Douglas fir beetle pheromones, which are chemicals that transmit a specific message to other Douglas fir beetles. We are using pheromones that attract the beetle and pheromones that dispel the beetle, so that we can manipulate the beetle population.”

Most of the forestland in Utah needs to be treated. “The use of these short-term chemical treatments is important to protect high value trees. However, long-term treatments of the forest itself are more important to reduce the susceptibility of our forests to catastrophic bark beetle outbreaks and also to reduce fuel for forest fires,” said Keyes.

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